SYNOPSIS OF THE PROPOSED PH.D THESIS ON

MODERN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS AND THEIR HERMENEUTICAL APPROACHES TOWARDS THE PROBLEMS OF MARGINALIZATION AND EXCLUSION

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Introduction

Christianity is said to be an egalitarian religion. But, religion itself becomes an instrument for the perpetuation of the colonial rule all over the world. Also the present church allows discrimination on the basis of race, gender and caste, though we witness the empowerment of the marginalized in the early church of the 1st century C.E. Though, theology is the systematic and rational study of the concept of God and its relation to humans and the nature, the determination of such relations is intertwined with relations of power too. The point is clear, whether the theology serves the needs of every individual in the society, or is it something lagging behind? The Blacks in America, the women of the world and the Dalits in India are deprived of the various aspects of life, having been discriminated in the name of race, gender and caste respectively. Such discriminations were reified in the name of religion too, and hence the need was felt to liberate theology from dominant power discourses. The necessary for a theology which is accessible to all the categories of humans, without any bias, was felt intensively, keeping the works and teachings of Jesus as its epicenter.

Objectives of the Study

1. The present thesis titled “Modern Christian Theological Movements and their Hermeneutical Approaches towards the problems of Marginalization and Exclusion”

is an attempt to study different modern theological movements, such as Liberation, Black, Feminist and Dalit Theologies

2. The study is also to understand their counter-cultural theological positions against the prevalent dominant theology of interested groups.
3. It attempts to understand how scripture, particularly Bible, is used as a means of domination and emancipation with interpretative tools and techniques.
4. To understand how religions and religious scriptures are used as emancipatory tools, apart from their being the custodian and maintenance of traditions.
5. This research attempts to find out the nuances of such interpretative theological venture of the suppressed classes in order to gain a holistic understanding of humanity.
6. The thesis also attempts to find out how such interpretative theological ventures really helped the suppressed identities to emerge from the position of oppression and how it influenced the real social changes in the reality.

Conceptual Framework

Theology – Theology is the systematic and rational study of concepts of God and of the nature of religious ideas.

Liberation Theology- Liberation Theology is a religious movement within Catholic Church around Lain American continent during 1950s-1960s, principally as a moral reaction to the poverty and social justice in the region.

Black Theology- Black Theology developed from Civil Right Movements in America, during 1960s. The movement started with the claiming of lost identity of the black masses also in order to emphasize Theology of Blacks.

Feminist Theology-Feminist Theology emerges in modern times as a challenge to the male bias in religion and society as a whole.

Dalit theology- Dalit theology is a branch of Christian theology that emerged among the dalit caste in India in the 1980s.

Re-reading- The reading of the Biblical texts from different suppressive contexts, such as race, gender and caste.

Hermeneutics- Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts.

From the above conceptual framework, the study focus on the systematic and theoretical understanding of Liberation, Black, Feminist and Dalit theology and their implications to secure individual and social liberation altogether. And also the study attempts how the study from contextual theological interpretation, helps to remove the discriminations on the basis of race, gender and caste.

Research Issues

The following are The Research Issues of the study:-

- What is the need for Black Theology, Feminist Theology and Dalit Theology?
- In what sense, the Liberation Theology is emancipatory and/or transformative in its ideological content?
- The problems of interpreting the Bible, as the interpretation is itself intertwined with the life circumstances of the interpreter. If so, whether such Biblical interpretations are value-neutral?
- The problems in perceiving the concept of god from one's culture-specific strategic position.
- What is the theoretical framework of Black, Feminist and Dalit theologians in addressing the problems of discrimination?
- How Liberation Theology served as the basis for furthering the interests of the marginalized communities?
- How this derivative understanding is related with the specificity of one's cultural position?
- How the derivative and interpretative meaning is related to the aspects of power relations?

Review of Literature

Most important book on the topic is *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings* (1996) by James B. Nickoloff, concentrates on the key texts and ideas of Gustavo Gutierrez. In this first anthology of Gutierrez's massively influential work, James Nickoloff draws from Gutierrez's many published books and translates some pieces for the first time. Arranged both thematically and chronologically, the selected texts highlight not only the revolutionary

import of Gutierrez's theology but also deep and penetrating spirituality, his brave view of the church, his personal challenge to the reader to directly engage with the injustices of the world. Nickoloff's expert introduction explains the development of Gutierrez thoughts and sheds new vision on the Latin American context of the thought, especially Peruvian. The book concentrates on the Latin America, though strands of Liberation theological movement develop from different contexts.

A Theology Of Liberation (1988) by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleton, enriched with an attempt at reflection, based on the gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of Liberation towards the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America. It is a theological reflection born of the experience of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human. This is the doctrine and seminal text of the movement which was later characterized as liberation theology. The book erupted upon the scene in the early seventies, and was swiftly acknowledged as a pioneering and prophetic approach to theology which famously made an option for the poor, placing the exploited, the alienated, and the economically wretched at the center of a programme where, the oppressed and maimed and blind and lame were prioritized at the expense of those who either maintained the status quo or who abused the structures of power for their own ends. This book attracted criticism for daring to mix politics and religion in so explicit way.

A Black Theology of Liberation (2010) by James H. Cone is one of the most important revolutionary books for Black theology. It is about the black struggle for justice and it attempts to search for perspective on Christian theology that would help African-Americans recognize that the gospel of the Jesus is not only consistent with their fight for liberation but is its central meaning for 20th century America. This book offered a searing indictment of white theology and society, introduced a radical reappraisal of the Christian message for our times. The book especially focused and limited on the Black masses and their discrimination on the basis of race. Sexism within the Black community, as a central problem in their society, is missed in this book. The white masses do the same with Racism.

Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective – A Theology (1974) by Letty M. Russell is an attempt to wrestle with the challenge by making a contribution to the Christian understanding of human liberation from the feminist perspective. The investigation of the book begins with an overview of the journey toward freedom. The middle part of the book

deals with the common themes of human liberation and theology and the ways in which we can search for a usable past which will give us an adequate basis for a useable human future. The themes on human liberation: salvation and conscientization, incarnation and humanization and communion in dialogue are incorporated in the latter part of the book and they are examined in the light of the Christian tradition. Liberation is experienced in the lives of Third World and Fourth world people, stated in this book. Finally prologue invites to make a new beginning on the ongoing revolution of freedom which is a part of God's plan for the whole human race. An understanding of race and caste discrimination that hinder the humanistic values is not taken into consideration in this book.

The book, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation* (2010) by Peniel Rajkumar, offers and explores the synoptic healing stories as a relevant biblical paradigm for Dalit theology in order to help redress the gaps between Dalit theology and the social practices in the Indian church. Peniel Rajkumar's starting point is that the growing influence of Dalit theology in academic circles is incompatible with the praxis of the Indian church. Paneil shows that even in the Church, Dalits face a great deal of discrimination. Author suggests that Dalit theology should be more proactive in its quest for justice and also more imaginative and responsible in its use of Scripture in the cause of Dalit. The book looks upon the discrimination of Dalit masses in the Indian Church by social practices, but study lack in focus on economic and political discrimination altogether, that might form the possible and vital ways of discrimination.

Scope of the Study

The study attempts to find out how theological interpretations against the dominant theological discourses make an impact on the socio-cultural and political realities of a particular society. At the same time, the study seeks to understand how the theological interpretations from the standpoints of Blacks, women, Dalits really helped for the social change or for the transformative politics, to create a new community based on equality without any discrimination.

Methodology of the Study

In the present study, the overall methodological framework will be descriptive and comparative analysis. Apart from these methodologies, the culture-historical and hermeneutical approaches to the study of the problem will be undertaken, as the social

suppression is understood on the cultural terms of race, gender and caste. Historical background of the each movement helps one towards the better comprehension of such movements as they are culture specific too.

As the present study focuses on the analysis of suppression, discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization, carried out with the aid of scripture, the hermeneutical analysis of the way in which scripture is used to dominate and maintain the tradition and, on the other hand, how the same scripture is used for deconstructing the domination is also essential. Hence, hermeneutical and critical-interpretative approaches play the key role to understand how they are used as a transformative tool for the marginalized section in the society, towards a transformative politics. Moreover, within the comparative analysis, it studies the process, development and nature of modern theological movements.

Sources of the Study

The present thesis attempts to study of the modern Christian Theologies, such as Liberation, Black, Feminist and Dalit theologies. It also attempts to find out the real connotation of the above theologies in appropriate terms. Authentic Bible (Old Testament and New Testament) is treated as the primary sources of the study. The authentic works in the above fields, such as books, journals, articles and other publications serve as the secondary tools of study. Also a detailed Bibliography is presented at the end of the thesis.

Tentative Chapterisation

The introductory chapter discusses the Introduction, the Objectives of the study, the Conceptual Framework, the Research Issues, the Review of Literature, the Scope of the Study, the Methodology of the Study, and the Sources of the Study.

The titled of the second chapter is "***Liberation Theology***". 'Theology' is the systematic and rational study of concepts of God and of the nature of religious ideas. According to Liberation Theologians, the prevailing theology is based on the self-interested groups of Western imperialism in the church and the society. In order to counter this, Liberation Theology evolved.

Liberation Theology has been described as "An interpretation of Christian faith out of the experience of the poor and as an attempt to read the Bible and the key Christian doctrines with the eyes of the poor". It was developed in 1950s-1960s in Latin America as a

movement within Catholic Church, principally as a moral reaction to the poverty and social justice in the region. The term was coined by '*Gustavo Gutierrez'* in 1971. Liberation theology could be interpreted as an attempt to return to the gospel of the early church where Christianity is politically and culturally decentralized. It seeks to interpret the actions of the Catholic Church and the teachings of Jesus Christ from the perspectives of the poor and disadvantaged.

Liberation is a process of self-liberation in a community with others. It is a way of participating in the humanity of God, joining experiment in being together with poor, so that we might be together in community with each other. Through the Biblical history, the action of Jesus is claiming as for poor and needy one not for an oppressor/rich who tried to interpret Bible into their terms. The following are keys to understand Liberation Theology.

Language of Biblical interpretation should be accessible to common people without any biasness rather than in favor of oppressor one. Language of God is normally constructed by self-interested groups for their personal benefits. Secondly, the church oppresses the lives of third world people by legitimatizing the status quo and helping to support White, western imperialism. The church needs to understand as an institution of God's liberative activity, equal participation on church and its ceremonial activities including all. Thirdly, the image of God should be conceived as liberative image rather confined to oppressor's interests. Fourth, salvation has a broad idea in the sense, it means for all humanity. The God's liberating work should be performing collectively, in order to holistic understanding and development of a community.

Liberation theology is a never-ending struggle by people to find out who they are and what they must became. It is an inductive approach rather than deductive. Liberation theology is an action-reflection (praxis) arises out of a commitment to Jesus Christ and a desire to understand the meaning of the good news in the light of the changing world.

The third chapter is titled ***"Black Theology".*** Black Theology emerges from within the Black masses. Black Theology got developed from Civil Right Movements in America, during 1960s. Martin Luther King Jr. is considered as a father of movement. The movement started with the reclaiming of lost identity. It encompasses social movements in the United States; its goals were to end racial segregation and discrimination against Black Americans and to secure them legal recognition not only in United States but to all over the world.

Several theologians wrote on Black's liberation. Among them *James Hal Cone* writing made a revolutionary impact in this connection. He was the founder of Black Liberation Theology theoretically. In1969, in his book *"Black theology and Black power*", he provided a new way to articulate the distinctiveness of theology in Black church. In 1970 another book title *"A Black Theology of Liberation"*, became a revolutionary book for the Black theologians. Blacks conceived the image of God as Black. Blackness is the symbol of oppression, and it helps to develop theology from this standpoint. Black religious thought reflects on the liberative folk impulse that has powered every struggle of African people in North America. As an institutional manifestation of the gospel message of freedom from injustice and oppression, a major task of Black church hinges on pursuing the end of racial discrimination and realizing equality.

The fourth chapter titled ***"Feminist Theology".*** Feminist Theology emerges out of gender discrimination or bias. Mary Wollstonecraft published one of the first Feminist treatises *"A Vindication of the Rights of Women".* The French author and philosopher Simon de Beauvoir's book *"The Second Sex"*, brings out the revolutionary concept on Existentialist Feminism. Christian Feminism is a branch of Feminist Theology which seeks to interpret and understand Christianity in light of the equality of women and men. Feminist Theology seeks for feminine image of God. Also at the same time, feminist theologians attempt to reconstruct the imageless god. Feminist Theology tries to abolish the patriarchal hold of the church, and demands for the equal status same as men. It is wrong to say that the feminist theologians claim for separate and higher authority; rather it seeks to ponder over solutions for the problem of inequality in every respect of religious activities through gender biasness.

Fifth chapter is titled as "***Dalit Theology***". Dalit Theology is a current issue emerging in the Asian Theological scene. The term 'Dalit' first coined by 19th century when a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary *Mahatma Jyotirao Phule* used it to describe the 'outcastes' and *'untouchables'* as a '*oppressed and crushed victims of Indian caste system'*. Dalits are those who have consciousness of being oppressed or suppressed by others in the name of their status in caste hierarchy in every spheres of life. Out of this, Dalit Theology is developed to counteract or to protest to gain their lost identity. Dalit masses are said to be the real inhabitant of Indian subcontinent, but by the introduction of *varnasharma dharma* and later on with the development of Hindu religion, Dalits were considered as untouchables through the spectrum of ritual pollution and purity. The writings of Bhim Rao Ambedkar are a key to understand the issues and problems faced by Dalits in Indian context. Through

Christianity, Dalits seek their solidarity, as God (Jesus) acting in solidarity with human being, particularly an oppressed of this world. Many historians, such as John Webster, say that the modern Dalit movement has begun in and through the Christian conversion movements. For Christian Dalit Theology, theology is the realization of their full humanness or conversely their full divinity, the idea of the image of God in Dalit. In this respect, Dalit theologians depend on Biblical metaphor. Using Biblical canon is to re-interpret the notion of Dalithood and their upliftment.

The final chapter, "***Conclusion***", will summarize the points discussed in each modern Christian theological movement and analyze the way the critique is done through the interpretative venture as a means of transformation and emancipation. Specially, this chapter will try to find out a common thread, if any, that underlies in all such movements and their interpretation of Bible, to evolve a theory of interpretative action.

Limitations

- Though the study based on the counter- theology, but there is the variation in the methodology, as Blacks, feminists and Dalit's history and culture is unique. So, in this situation, it is difficult to comprehend the single methodology applied to them.
- The problems of interpreting the Bible, as the interpretation is itself intertwined with the life circumstances of the interpreter.
- The hermeneutical principle used to interpret the Bible by the modern theologians is on theoretical basis rather on action- orientation.
- The researches on suppressed identities have certain limitations if they are not actually carried out by the people of the suppressed identities themselves. Though we aim for impartial researches in social science, the feeling of suppression is a lived one for the suppressed people. So there are certain difficulties in understanding and elaborating the lived experiences of the suppressed class masses if it is not lived-experience of the researcher, however she/he is empathetically approaches the problems of suppression.

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